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ABSTRACT

In the summer of 1986, three institutions (West Virginia State College, West Virginia College of Graduate Studies, and West Virginia Institute of Technology) consorted to design an alternative teacher certification program to attract and retain a qualified pool of mathematics and science teachers. Known as the Field-Based Training Program (FBTP), it was piloted during the 1986/87 academic year to determine whether an alternative field-based delivery system could attract talented, "second career" adults into teaching, especially in those fields where shortages continuously exist. The major features of the FBTP included: (1) preliminary identification and screening of potential participants; (2) structured group interviews; (3) preassessment of cognitive professional knowledge base; (4) accelerated instruction block, including human development and learning, instructional strategies, classroom management, special education, and reading of content areas; (5) internship with observation and induction into teaching roles; (6) professional seminars; (7) orientation and clarification of program roles for mentors; and (8) program identification. Following completion of the pilot program, it was agreed that an accelerated field-based delivery system was needed as an option in West Virginia and the program should continue. This report describes the second year of the FBTP and related outcomes. (JD)

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A COLLABORATIVE, ALTERNATIVE TEACHER
CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

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PROGRAM INTRODUCTION/OVERVIEW

Historically, the primary source of public school teachers has been the college age student who completes a pre-service teacher training program and enters the profession. This source of teachers is no longer adequate, therefore new approaches must be identified and used to obtain competent teachers for the profession, particularly in shortage areas such as math and science. The number of teachers in mathematics and the sciences seems to be adversely affected by the potential for individuals with this training to work in more lucrative positions. Nationally we are not training a sufficient number of qualified math and science teachers to meet demands. Efforts in West Virginia to attract and retain a qualified pool of math and science teachers for K-12 settings have met with limited success. Interested second career individuals could provide a potential pool of candidates to help alleviate the needs in our

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schools for such personnel if certification preparation consistent with their age, training, and experience could be provided.

In the summer of 1986, three institutions, West Virginia State College (WVSC), West Virginia College of Graduate Studies (WVCOGS), and West Virginia Institute of Technology (WVIT), consorted to design an alternative teacher certification program that could capitalize upon a recent reduction pool of highly qualified scientific and technical personnel from the local chemical industry. •

Known now as the Field-Based Training Program (FBTP), it was piloted during the 1986/87 academic year to determine whether an alternative field-based delivery system could attract talented, "second career" adults into teaching, especially into those fields where shortages continuously exist. Individuals with academic credentials in or related to science and/or mathematics, work experience and an interest in teaching were the target population for the FBTP.

The major features of the program included: 1) Preliminary identification and screening of potential participants; 2) Structured group interviews using teams of higher education and public school personnel; 3) Preassessment of cognitive professional knowledge base, including perceived competency of essential teaching skills; 4) Accelerated instructional block including human development and learning,

instructional strategies, classroom management, special education, and reading of content areas; 5) Internship with observation and gradual induction into teaching roles; experience monitored by experienced mentor teacher and college coordinator; 6) Professional seminars on-campus concurrent with internship, for support and practical analyses of experiences; 7) Orientation and clarification of program roles for mentors, and 8) Program evaluation by interns, mentor teachers, and program administrations via questionnaires and structured individual interviews.

Following completion of the pilot program and minor modifications in scheduling and related programming, members from the West Virginia College of Graduate Studies (WVCOGS), West Virginia Institute of Technology (WVIT), and West Virginia State College (WVSC) reached agreement that an accelerated field-based delivery system was needed as an option in the state and that the institutions should continue to offer the program with careful monitoring. This report describes the second year of the FBTP and related outcomes.

As in the pilot, the major emphasis was the structure and delivery of a professional education knowledge base and related field internship. A major task was to provide accelerated "non-traditional" delivery within a traditional framework of the state's "approved programs" concept of teacher

certification. This model was designed to make the best use of the participants previous training and knowledge, be geared to their adult learning styles, and related specifically to their needs. When participants completed the program they were fully certified by the State of West Virginia. Eight (8) participants began the program after previous careers in architecture, chemical and petroleum engineering, geology, natural resources, pharmaceutical sales, and laboratory technology. Seven completed the program in areas of certification including mathematics and computer science, chemistry, general science, and biology. All but one are fully employed in K-12 school settings.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Identification and Selection

Questionnaires were mailed to individuals who appeared on statewide, substitute teaching pools, who responded to an advertisement (Appendix A) in local newspapers, or who contacted consortial participants about the program. Approximately seventy questionnaires were returned indicating an interest in being considered for the program. Since funding allowed for certification only in the areas of math and science, approximately sixty of these were not eligible for the program. Twelve

individuals whose background was consistent with the math and science mission of the program were invited by the program director for an interview with public school and higher education personnel. Prior to interviews applicant's credentials were analyzed to determine if a match existed between previous content preparation and appropriate certification requirements. Generally, a "3/4 rule" was applied; prior completion of 3/4 of a content field. Those who did meet this criterion or could not complete their additional content requirements during the training year were advised to address their content needs and then reapply to the program at the next phase.

At the interview individuals received detailed information about the training program and were taken through an interview designed to elicit information about their academic credentials, their personal assessment of suitability for teaching, their previous teaching/instructional activities or related experiences, and their involvement with adolescent age youth. During the interview the screening committee looked for evidence of interest in and commitment to youth, successful communication/human relation skills, suitability for working with adolescents, commitment to program goals and training timetables. Twelve individuals were interviewed; ten were invited to enter the program, eight chose to do so, four males and four females. Of the two who did not choose to enter the

program, one had a job conflict and the other had a family illness requiring relocation. Motivation for entering the program (and teaching) fell basically into three categories: "fits my lifestyle; "unstable employment in my field"; "retired but not tired". Moreover, all participants had an interest in remaining in West Virginia where suitable employment opportunities were lacking.

Preassessment

As noted, those accepted into the program were given a content assessment to determine the most feasible teaching specializations for each to pursue. Transcripts were reviewed and a program status sheet was provided outlining the remaining specific content needs, if any. These had to be addressed outside the program and could include formal coursework, standardized assessments, or individual prescriptions based on the State approved content specialization objectives.

Since the professional education component of the teacher training program was the focus of this program each candidate selected was given a formal professional education knowledge base preassessment. The instrument, which had minimal revisions from the pilot, was designed to assess cognitive knowledge in human growth and development, educational and learning psychology, instructional planning and delivery, special education concerns and classroom and behavior management

strategies. Primarily, it was derived from professional education core concepts and knowledge base of existing approved programs at the participating undergraduate institutions. Results from the preassessment instrument were used to sequence candidates into an instructional block that occurred from October 1987 through January 1988.

Once into the internship, a "performance" preassessment was conducted in the school setting by the school supervisor and the participants themselves. Using a set of eight professional teaching competencies with descriptors most basic to beginning teaching, each candidate self-assessed their current level of proficiency. Mentor teachers did likewise, and results were clustered for analysis and subsequently addressed in campus seminars.

Entry into the instructional block could vary depending upon preassessment results. Participants could receive a rating of Mastery, indicating they exceeded expectations for a beginning teacher; Proficiency, indicating that they met the expectations for a beginning teacher; Approximation, indicating that they meet some aspects of training; or Full training, indicating complete training. Several individuals received a level of Proficiency or Approximation on components of their preassessment but all program participants opted to take all professional coursework for graduate credit to develop or re-

fresh their professional knowledge and to maintain a sense of group unity.

On the written program evaluation questionnaire and in follow-up interviews, interns indicated that they felt the instrument was valid and clearly indicated areas where they needed training.

Instruction

Full-time faculty from WVSC, WVCOGS, and WVIT consortia institutions delivered Instructional Theories, Math and Science Methods, Technology in Education, Reading in the Content Areas, Psychology of Development, Special Education, and Psychology of Learning. The block was an expansion from a four week experience in the pilot which included similar content, but was expanded because feedback from pilot participants indicated a need for more training. The focus remained upon content and skill most basic for classroom entry. All program participants listed the quality of instruction as the primary strength of the program.

Interns indicated that the course content was well sequenced and relevant to their field work. One suggestion was for the faculty to work more closely when planning the courses so repetition could be eliminated. One participant felt a need for structured experiences in the school prior to entering the internship.

During the internship period the interns met on campus once a week for "debriefing" sessions, which were used to discuss and analyze experiences with their peers. In addition to the sharing of experiences, speakers were brought in to deal with specialized topics such as grading, exceptional children in the regular classroom, and managing classrooms. A seminar facilitator put these experiences into "theoretical" and practical perspectives.

Field Placement

The field-placement was for one semester and was consistent with the WV Board of Education (WVBOE) verification requirements of professional skills at all programmatic levels and content specializations for which certification is sought. Placements were made in cooperation with central office and building personnel.

Each participant was placed in a setting under the supervision of a classroom teacher or "mentor", college coordinator and, on occasion, county supervisor. While general expectations were outlined for the mentors the actual role each assumed varied. Each mentor needed to be fully certified, have considerable experience and success in teaching in the content area, and be recommended from either the county or building level as a competent teacher with the skills necessary for working as supervision.

Initially, the college coordinator, intern, and mentor teacher met to discuss and clarify role and related responsibilities, including assessment procedures. Interns gradually induced teaching responsibilities and the noninstructional duties of their mentors. Periodic performance assessments were conducted individually and jointly by college and public school supervisors to track progress, identify needs and plan training. Interns experienced the full realities of the school setting by performing normal non-instructional duties, including supervision of students, completion of attendance reports and records, grade cards and other "housekeeping" responsibilities. The college coordinator made regular visits to the interns to observe performance and confer with mentor teachers.

Professional Seminars

Periodic seminars, on campus, focused upon the participant's experiences and related needs. Interns indicated a high value for coming back to campus and spending time with their peers to "share and compare". As one intern stated, "...the group was a good sounding board, they were very supportive." As one higher education faculty member stated, "the sense of we-ness is a crucial component of the program." The only concern about the seminars was the fact that they were scheduled on a Wednesday afternoon and interns had to miss one or more of their classes. This is a common concern in

traditional program often voiced by the public school participants and student teachers.

Current literature supports this need for group identity. The use of "cohort" groups is being successfully used as a means of providing support for traditional student teachers during an emotionally intense experience. It also provides a mechanism for assisting students to establish a professional identity. Work with the field-based interns and their response to the importance of having a regularly scheduled time to meet with their peers supports the concept of working with students in cohort groups or classes.

Evaluation and Assessment

Interns in the FBTP were required to demonstrate the same competencies and program requirements as those students in the traditional teacher education program. These included a standardized preprofessional assessment, a standardized content specialization test in each content field, and a professional performance assessment, which was designed within the program.

One intern was not required to complete the basic skills test because he had completed a master's degree. All others took and met the mandatory proficiency level for basic skills. All interns who were certified met required proficiency levels on each content test in areas for which they were seeking certification. Professional competencies were

jointly verified in a public school setting by the mentor teacher and the college supervisor. The field placement for one was terminated at the request of the public school mentor. After repeating the experience in a different setting that mentor recommended that the candidate not receive a satisfactory evaluation on the performance assessment. Subsequently, this candidate was terminated in the program.

Program Evaluation and Findings

Assessment of the project was achieved through the use of questionnaires, followed by structured audio-taped interviews with selected participants. In addition, visit the field sites by higher education supervisors, documentation of meetings and seminars to determine the type and frequency of questions, and examination of documents were used for program evaluation. Ethnographic documentation was used to provide documentation of the second year of the field-based training program.

The eight interns who entered the program were asked to complete a questionnaire followed by a structured interview with selected interns which was tape recorded and confidentially transcribed. Three participants from institutions of higher education were interviewed. The evaluation was conducted by a consortia faculty member who had no involvement in the instructional and supervisory phases of the project.

Consistent with the pilot findings assumptions were not made regarding content knowledge. As a preliminary screening, a formal, written transcript analysis was completed to determine specific content needs in addition to the professional block. If completion of remaining content need seemed beyond the scope of program time frames, the individual was advised to pursue the content coursework before being considered for the program. A general rule of thumb was the "3/4's rule". As in the pilot when students were taking content course work concurrently with the program, it was a struggle to keep up with the demands.

Program participants agree that while a strong background in content is important it must be complemented with professional knowledge. Also, the age of the content, especially in the sciences, was noted as a concern, as well as the compatibility of prior content with public school curricula. Engineering candidates, for example, had not taken geometry since high school and simply were not "pedestrian" ready for teaching this content.

The interns indicated that the professional education courses were valuable and necessary. However, the coursework did not prepare them for the "cultural shock", and several interns indicated that a period of observation prior to entering the internship would have been very valuable. Adjustment to the school environment was difficult for some interns due to

differences in the intern's expectations and the reality of student attitudes, motivation, and discipline.

Another finding from the pilot which held during the second phase was that communication among all participants is critical to the success of a project, particularly in terms of defining roles, and expectations. Extreme care must be taken to ensure that all participants understand terms, expectations and responsibilities. The selection and screening process is critical and should include former participants in the alternative program. A number of individuals indicated that this could be the most important component of the program.

Communication of expectations and selection was an issue in terms of the mentor and their role. Intern placement was determined on the basis of where the intern lived, though county personnel made the actual placement. While most of the placements were very positive the program lacks control and has limited recourse when there is a problem. Time available for conferencing between mentors and college coordinators was also very limited.

The program director maintained regular contact with the interns and mentors throughout the program. The contact was achieved through the college supervisor who regularly visited the interns classroom, and through the weekly seminars when interns returned to campus.

Summary and Conclusions

All role groups involved in the project continue to support the idea that an alternative delivery system is important to attract talented, experienced individuals into teaching. These individuals seem to have the potential to bring an important experiential dimension to the classroom from their work experience and impacting those students who ask, "Why do we need to learn this?" All participants in the program indicated their support for continuing the program and a willingness to be involved again. One individual commented on teaching that, "I enjoy it probably three more times than I anticipated enjoying it." An appealing aspect of the program was the quickness in which one could begin teaching.

The project has had several tangible results at the state level. During the summer of 1987, the Board of Regents allocated \$30,000 for study of issues related to alternative certification. Part of these funds were used to fund a state conference which included various constituencies interested in alternative approaches to certification for teachers. Following the input at this conference a document was put together on alternative certification which has been presented to the State Board of Education, the State Board of Regents and selected legislators. Another result has been the inclusion of policy on alternative certification in State Board of Education regulations influencing certification of teachers.

While we believe effective beginnings have been made, a number of issues have emerged including role clarification for mentors and the differences between working with student teachers and interns. We also look ahead to identifying a more detailed professional knowledge base and integrating some aspects of that into a cooperative preparation program with public school staff and administrators. Another area of interest is the intern's perceived level of instructional effectiveness, given their depth of subject matter and experiential knowledge.

Currently, a follow-up system is being designed to survey candidates about these issues and related training outcomes. These results will be used to further judge the effectiveness of the FBTP and guide the future development of policies, components, and related training activities. Overall, the findings are positive and point to a continuation of this effort with special attention given to the following:

1. A formal assessment of content knowledge needs to occur. Assumptions cannot be made when coursework is dated or not positively correlated with state certification content specialization patterns.

2. Academic and field preparation in professional education is critical to assure that beginning teachers have demonstrated the competencies necessary for effective teaching.

3. Formal channels of communication are needed to facilitate the flow of information between the various participants and to assure common understanding of roles, responsibilities, and expectations.

4. The selection and screening process is critical and should be a joint effort of higher education and public school personnel.

5. Consortial arrangements can be positive but require a great deal of time and commitment on the part of all involved.